

“Eternal Bodies”: images of archangels in the upper parts of Nubian buildings



Abstract: Images of archangels painted in the upper parts of buildings and on structural elements were popular in Christian Nubian painting, as the discoveries made recently in Church SWN.B.V on the citadel in Old Dongola have shown. These images, which derive from pre-Christian art, depict the eternal nature of the archangels and angels. Presenting a select group of images, the author traces their origins in an effort to highlight the role of archangels as intermediaries between God and mankind. As spiritual beings they move freely between the Heavens and the Earth, making air and cosmic space their natural surroundings. Moreover, archangels govern the forces of nature, the planets, and the seven skies. Therefore, their sanctuaries were located on hill summits, in the upper chapels, on structural elements of ecclesiastical buildings, etc. The Nubian tradition is therefore part of a broader Mediterranean tradition, the roots of which should be sought in the Near East.

Keywords: archangels, angels, Nubia, early Christian, wall paintings

Images of angels and archangels were very popular in Christian Nubia. One can find them in all of the churches, monastery annexes, even in private houses. As intermediaries between God and mankind, archangels and angels had many functions. They adored the Lord and assisted him during celestial court ceremonies. They were mes-

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sengers, guardians, protectors, healers, fighters of demons, etc. Their wings were intended to enable faster movement. However, wings were not mentioned in the canonical Books of the Holy Scripture, nor were they represented in the oldest images of archangels and angels (Berefelt 1968: 6; Martin 2001: 12). Whenever angels are mentioned in the Holy Scripture, they either “come” or “go”, or “stand” (Berefelt 1968: 17). Note the description of the Annunciation: “And the angel **came** in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly

favorable, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28).

The paper is dedicated to a discussion of a select group of images of angels and archangels painted on the walls of the staircase of the Cathedral in Faras/Pachoras and on the supporting elements of this and other buildings in Nubia. The preceding introduction concerns the essence of angels and archangels perceived as eternal, winged beings, backed by a review of manifestations of this perception in early Christian and Mediterranean art.



As messengers of God (Gr. ἄγγελοι = messengers, ἀρχάγγελοι = chief messengers) angels undertook special missions, but even so they had to manage without wings, at least in the Bible. When the Archangel Raphael appeared to Tobit as a guide for his son, he looked just like any ordinary man and he did not change this image all the way from Nineveh to Media and back. He revealed his real identity only at the last moment, when a thankful Tobit wished to give him money in return for his help.

In keeping with the descriptions in the Holy Scripture, the oldest known images of angels in art presented them as androgenic wingless figures. They were difficult to recognize unless identified by the *tituli* of the iconographic context. For example, in the 4th century painting of the scene of Balaam's Donkey (Num. 22:21–39), found in an arcosolium of Cubiculum F in the mortuary hypogeum under the Via Latina and Via Dino Compagni in Rome, the angel standing in the way of the prophet on his donkey is depicted as a severe-

looking man, a little larger than Balaam. Serious-faced, he holds a drawn sword in his hand [Fig. 1]. He has no wings and there is no *titulus* describing this scene. In fact, it is only the presence of the donkey that helps to recognize the scene (Ferrua 1990: 83, 85, Fig. 82).

Images of angels with wings appeared already at the end of the 4th and in the beginning of the 5th century, and one is entitled to wonder why this process, which seems quite sophisticated, took place at this time. First, early Christian art used the language of antique pagan imaginary, as demonstrated persuasively already by scholars like Ferdinand Piper (1847–1851) and André Grabar (1961), not to mention a host of others. In ancient religious art, spiritual beings and gods were often equipped with wings, especially if their function was in any way connected with protective or funerary tasks, or their role as messengers. The entrances to Assyrian palaces were guarded by sculptures of Lamassu deities depicted as hybrid creatures with bodies of bulls and hu-



Fig. 1. Balaam on his she-donkey in front of the Angel, wall painting in the arcosolium of Cubiculum F in the Dino Compagni Hypogeum at the Via Latina Catacomb, Rome, 4th century (After Ferrua 1990: Fig. 82 | digital processing A. Ambroziak)



Fig. 2. The body of Sarpedon, carried by Thanatos and Hypnos with Hermes in attendance, Red-figure krater by Euphronios, about 515 BC (Archaeological Museum of Cerveteri, Italy © J. Ardiles-Arce | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euphronios_Krater#/media/File:Euphronios_krater_side_A_MET_L.2006.10.jpg)

man heads, and wings on their backs. In ancient Egypt, protective goddesses like Isis were represented with wings as well. Gods who were *psychopompoi*, guiding the souls of the dead to the afterlife, were depicted with wings, also in Greek art.¹

A touching scene on an Attic red-figured calyx-krater by Euphronios (about 515 BC), represents Hermes, Thanatos (Death), and Hypnos (Sleep) around the dead body of Sarpedon, a Trojan War hero [Fig. 2].² The twin brothers Thanatos and Hypnos carrying the body of Sarpedon have spectacularly huge wings, whereas Hermes-Psychopompos wears only the *talaria*, the winged sandals.

Personifications of the winds in Greek art were also represented with wings. They can be found on pottery as well as on architectural monuments like the Tower of the Winds in the Roman Agora of Athens (mid-1st century BC) [Fig. 3]. This octagonal building, admired by Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, acted as a weathervane.

“Above that, tower he (Andronicus of Cyrrha) caused to be made a marble upright and above it, he placed a bronze Titan holding a rod in his right hand. He so contrived

it that it was driven around by the wind and always faced the current of air, and held the rod as an indicator above the representation of the wind blowing” (Vitr. I, 6:4).

Apart from practical, the images of the winds also bore symbolic meaning associated with the number eight. According to Plato, the atom-like forms of fundamental particles of the air had the shape of an octahedron (Ball 2002: 9). Considering that wind is air, this symbolism is clear. Each of the personifications represented on the Athenian Horologion holds an attribute connected with the power of the wind.³ Therefore, these winged male figures have power over the elements. One should also note a description of four angels from the Book of Revelation, who are said to stand on the four corners of the Earth and who wield power over the winds.

“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree. I saw another angel ascending

1 Other winged creatures in Greek art include Gorgonae, Harpyiai, Pegisides, Sphinxes, Eos, Eros, and other, see Ostrowski 2002: 473.

2 The krater was found in an Etruscan tomb and was bought for the collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1972; in 2008 it was repatriated to Italy (Spivey 2019: 42–43).

3 “Four of the winds have beards to indicate adult status, while the remaining four are beardless youths. Boreas (north) blows into a conch shell to summon the group. Caecius (northeast) pours hailstones from a shield. Apeliotes (east) is young and carries grain and fruit in his cloak. Eurus (southeast) has his arm hidden in his cloak to summon a hurricane. Notus (south) is a youth who pours rain out of a vase. Lips (southwest) also young, leans on the stern of a boat and blows it on its way. Zephyrus (west), shown as a nude youth, scatters flowers. And Sciron (northwest) is an older man who empties a cauldron to signify the beginning of winter” (Darling 2004: 216).

from the rising of the sun, heaving the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea saying: Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal of their foreheads" (Rev. 7:1–3)⁴

This description of four angels holding the winds follows the account of the Lamb opening the seven seals (Rev. 6: 1–17). This vision finds its reflection in the visual arts in the form of four angels standing in the corners of the vault. On the cross-ribbed vault in the presbytery of San Vitale in Ravenna (consecrated 548), the angels placed in the four groin



Fig. 3. The Tower of the Winds built by Andronicus of Cyrrhus, Roman Agora in Athens, mid 1st century BC (© Georg Zumstrull / CC BY-SA 2.0 DE)

4 The Book of Revelation goes on to describe seven angels who stand in the proximity of God. They also rule over the forces of the nature and have the power to cause cataclysms by blowing their seven trumpets (Rev. 8: 15). See Łaptaś 2014: 291.

vault panels raise their arms, supporting the central medallion [Fig. 4]. The Lamb of God is shown inside the medallion. The angels stand on globes, which are placed on top of the acanthus branches. The vault panels are separated by four arrises, decorated with garland motifs. This kind of composition was assimilated with representations of the seasons in late antique art. Glenn Peers compared the San Vitale vault image with a mosaic from the residence at Daphne near Antioch (housed in the Louvre Museum, about AD 325, Acc. No. 97216002; Peers 2001: 28–29). There, the female personifications of four seasons are depicted with wings. They are placed at the corners of the composition representing hunting scenes. The difference between the two mosaics is their place in the respective architecture: one is on a floor and the

other on a vault, one decorated a private residence and the other a church.

Additionally, the origins of angelic representations on vaults or pillars should be searched for among images of ancient caryatids, later transposed into winged Nikes-Victorias. An example to cite here is a pillar with a sculptured Nike-Victoria from the portico of the agora in Thessaloniki. This relief is dated to the late 2nd–early 3rd century AD (The Louvre Museum Acc. No. MA 1391). The frontally rendered figure stands upright, her wings are lowered [Fig. 5]. Her foot rests elegantly on the base of the pillar, while her head supports the capital. Despite her function—a caryatid supporting a pillar—she looks delicate and full of grace.

The angels took over a caryatid role after the ancient Victories. Their images were carved on pillars and columns, and

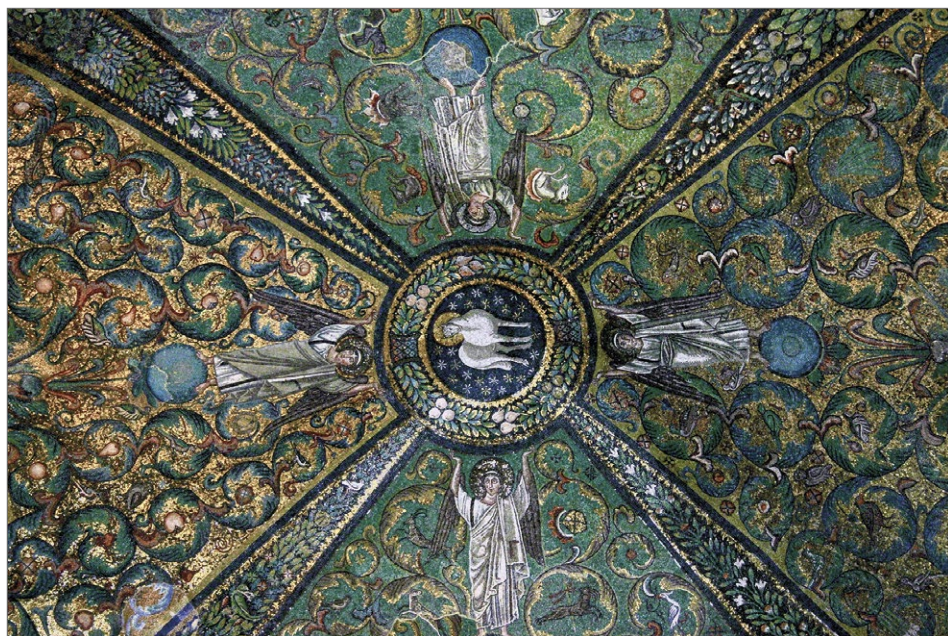


Fig. 4. The Lamb of God in a medallion supported by four angels, mosaic decoration on the vault of the presbytery of St Vitale in Ravenna (Photo D. Rywiková)

especially on capitals scattered throughout the Mediterranean. One can recall here an elegant example of a bust of the



Fig. 5. Nike-Victoria from the Portico of the Caryatids in Thessaloniki, late 2nd–early 3rd century AD (The Louvre Museum Acc. No. MA 1391) The Louvre © M.-L. Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons)

Archangel Michael from Constantinople dated to 1250–1300 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) [Fig. 6]. The subject also became very popular in Western medieval art. For example, in the Church of Our Lady on the Sands in Wrocław, all nine angelic choirs were represented on the carved Gothic corbels supporting the vault (Studniarek 1968: 14; Grzybowski 1997: 221).

Glorification of God is another aspect of the winged angels' function. It derives from the role of Victories in glorifying the images of the emperors. In ancient Greece, certain gods were represented holding a standing Nike in their hands.⁵ It was a favorite motif with the 5th-century BC sculptor Phidias as both his Athena



Fig. 6. Capital with a bust of the Archangel Michael, Metropolitan Museum of Art (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/466108>)

⁵ In Greek art, Nike was associated primarily with victories in sport competitions; it was later added also to scenes of military victories (Ostrowski 2002: 477).

Parthenos in Athens and his Zeus at Olympia were shown in this way.⁶ The motif was adopted in Roman art. A coin of Diocletian shows Jupiter holding in his right hand an orb with a figure of Victory standing on it (Ostrowski 2002: 482, Fig. 9). The orb is an ideal shape, with neither beginning nor end, hence symbolic of God's perfection. Victory standing on an orb was an allegory of triumph over the world. With the development of the cosmic kingship idea, which reached Rome from the East, the Roman emperors started being portrayed with planetary and astral attributes (L'Orange 1982: 35–36). In this case, Victory standing on an orb symbolized the deified emperors' power over the world. Sometimes two rulers were portrayed with an orb, sharing their imperial authority. On the reverse of a coin of Gratian, the emperors Gratian and Valentinian II are seated on their thrones, holding an orb [Fig. 7]. Victory is shown in the background, hovering above them, (Łaptaś 1997: 25, Fig. 1). Once Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire, Victory was replaced by the Archangel Michael (e.g., obverse of a golden solidus of Justinian, Łaptaś 1997: Figs 1–2).

Another scene that was almost a cliché in Christian and Byzantine art, borrowed from ancient Roman representations, is the image of two flying Victories-angels holding a medallion between them (Jastrzębowska 2011: Figs 1–2). This scene also derived from the

East, e.g., an Achaemenid seal presenting the god Ahuramazda in a medallion supported by two winged creatures (Segall 1956: 75).

While Early Christian art had at its disposal a wide range of pre-Christian motifs that could serve as inspiration, visual sources were hardly the only ones to impact the creation of winged images of angels. Let us take a look at apocryphal texts and the commentaries of the Church Fathers. Among the Apocrypha coming from a pre-Christian Judaic tradition (Sparks 1984: 169), one might quote the Ethiopic Book of Enoch. This compilation of several texts is a rich source on antique angelology (Jędrzejewski 2006: 207). The Book of Parables⁷ contains a description of angels with wings:



Fig. 7. Gold solidus of Gratian showing Gratian and Valentinian II on the reverse, Trier mint, AD 375–378 (Courtesy National Museum in Warsaw | photo K. Balakier and H. Kruszweska)

6 “The god sits on a throne, and he is made of gold and ivory. On his head lies a garland which is a copy of olive shoots. In his right hand he carries a Victory, which, like the statue, is of ivory and gold; she wears a ribbon and—on her head—a garland” (Paus. V, 11:1).

7 The dating of this Book varies from AD 50–170 to AD 270 (Alexander 1977: 156–159).

"And in those days I saw long cords given to those angels, and they acquired wings for themselves, and flew and went towards the north" (1 En. 61:1)

The Hebrew Book of Enoch also contains a description of the 72 wings which were given by God to Enoch upon his transformation into the Angel Metatron:⁸

"72 wings grow on me, 36 on each side. And each wing was as the whole world. And He fixed on me 365,000 eyes: each eye was a great luminary" (3 En. 9:3–4).

The Church Fathers, Tertullian as well as Origen, apparently knew the text of the Apocryphal Book of Enoch.⁹ Tertullian justified the need for angels to have wings:

"Every spirit is possessed of wings. This is a common property of both angels and demons. So they are everywhere in a single moment: the whole world is as one place to them" (Tert. *Apol.* 22:8)

Not only wings, but most of all the nature and corporality of the angels was the subject of the Church Fathers' dis-

course. Were they corporeal or incorporeal (Gr. ἀσώματοι, Clem. Al. *Exc. Theod.* I, 11:4)? On one hand, there was a tradition deriving from ancient Stoic philosophy, according to which "every substance is necessary of the body" (Bonino 2016: 113). Tertullian wrote:

"Everything which exists is a bodily existence *sui generis*. Nothing lacks bodily existence but that which is non-existent" (Tert. *De Carn. Christ.* XI:4)

On the other hand, it was necessary to find a solution that would place the angels inferior to God and superior to man (Bonino 2016: 113). As only God is an incorporeal being, the angels have to be corporeal, yet their bodies are different from those of human beings. They have subtle bodies,¹⁰ which allow them to move in space. This view, based on the opinions of the Church Fathers, as well as on models known from ancient art, caused angels subsequently to be perceived as eternal beings. Following this notion, their sanctuaries were located on hilltops and in the upper parts of buildings. In 590, Pope Gregory I led a penitential procession to ask God to stop the plague devastating Rome. Suddenly, he saw the Archangel Michael standing atop of the Mausoleum

8 This part of the text is dated to the 1st century AD (see Prokopowicz 2013: 6).

9 Tert. *De cult. fem.* I:3, 1. I am aware that the Scripture of Enoch, which has assigned this order (of action) to angels, is not accepted by some, because it is also not admitted into the Jewish canon.

10 Bishop John of Thessalonica (died about 630 or 649, Kazhdan 1991: 1044). "Concerning angels and archangels and the holy Powers that are above them—and I shall add our human souls—the Catholic Church recognizes them to be spiritual, but not altogether incorporeal and invisible, as you pagans say; rather as having a fine body of an aerial or fiery nature, as it is written: 'Who maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire'" (Mango 1993: 140).

of the Emperor Hadrian and sheathing his sword as a sign that the plague would cease (Shwartz 2013). Pope Boniface IV dedicated to Archangel Michael a chap-

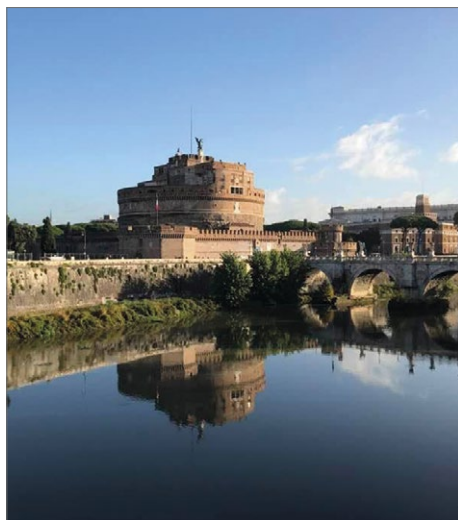


Fig. 8. Mausoleum of Hadrian, renamed Castel Sant' Angelo, Rome (Photo A. Głusiuk)

el built on top of Hadrian's Mausoleum (subsequently renamed Castel Sant' Angelo, Osborne 2013: 275) [Fig. 8]. Also, sanctuaries of Archangel Michael, such as Mount Gargano or Mount St Michel, which became large pilgrimage centers, were located on hilltops (Arnold 2000; Everett 2002) [Fig. 9]. Consequently, archangels were venerated in the upper chapels, galleries, or towers (Crosnier 1862: 695; Vallery-Radot 1929: 453–454).

Taking into consideration that the cult of the eternal and winged angels started to develop during late antique–early Byzantine times, it is not surprising that it reached Nubia following the conversion of the land to Christianity. The location of images inside Christian buildings was subordinated to the iconographic program and the art interacted with the worshippers as well (Cormack 1985: 9–17).



Fig. 9. Mont Saint-Michel, Sanctuary of the Archangel Michael on a rocky islet, Normandy, France (Photo M.C. Flossmann-Schütze)

II

The context of the disposition of archangels inside Nubian buildings was meaningful. In their role as protectors of buildings, the archangels were painted on either side of the entrances. As court dignitaries, they were represented in attendance of the God, or the Virgin, sometimes in the apses. They protected mortals and were also painted in places chosen by the founders (even in apses).

The context chosen as the subject of this paper was associated with highlighting the eternal nature of the archangels. Included among images of this kind are the freestanding figures of archangels located in the upper parts of buildings. Despite the destruction of most of the vaults of medieval buildings in Nubia, some images of archangels were preserved on the walls of the Cathedral in Faras. Additionally, images of archangels were found painted on pillars and columns. Their placement on elements supporting the vaults (symbolically celestial vaults) evoked their function connected with the four elements, the winds and caryatids deriving from pre-Christian art.

The walls of the staircase in the southwestern corner of the Cathedral at Faras, excavated by Kazimierz Michałowski in the early 1960s, were decorated with four images of the archangels. Two were painted on the first coat of plaster and the other two on a superimposed coat.

The early (8th century) mural of the archangel Michael was painted on the west wall of the staircase (see Michałowski 1974: 103–105, Cat. No. 9, Pl. 9; Jakobielski et al. 2017: 160, Cat. No. 29). The only surviving fragments of the figure are the

face, part of the arms and the left wing [Fig. 10 top]. The archangel is rendered frontally, looking out at the viewer. He is dressed in a tunic with semicircular collar and a *loros* (a goldish strip running diagonally from the left arm). In his right hand, he holds a trumpet (partly preserved). The elegant long neck, oval face and big almond-shaped eyes are like that of St Anne and the two archangels flanking the western entrance to the Cathedral, all painted also on the first plaster coat. Dark purple is the dominant color in these murals. The knot of hair on top of the archangel's head resembles the hairdos of other archangels.

The trumpet resembles that held by the figure of Archangel Michael depicted by the western entrance to the Cathedral. It helps to identify this image, even though the *titulus* of the mural is not preserved, because, luckily, the murals of the archangels by the entrance to the Cathedral are well preserved along with the *tituli*. Michael can be seen written above the head of the archangel holding the trumpet [Fig. 11]. The archangel will blow the trumpet to summon to the Last Judgment, hence the symbolism of this image is connected with the Resurrection. The way to the Resurrection is the way to the Heavens, therefore placing the image of the archangel on the wall of the staircase is justified. The importance of the image in this place inside the Cathedral is demonstrated by another painting of an archangel rendered in the same place on a later coat of plaster.

The later painting was also preserved only in the upper part: head, upper part

of arms and wings. (Jakobielski et al. 2018: 215–216, Cat. No. 55).¹¹ The archangel is rendered frontally, looking out to the viewers, his wings lowered [Fig. 10 bottom]. He has more attributes compared to the earlier image: a halo around his head and a crown. The crown, a golden *stemma* studded with precious stones, is rimmed with rows of pearls. The archangel is dressed in a chlamys, fastened on his right arm with a fibula. A gentle face with almond-shaped eyes and green highlights dates the mural to the 10th century (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 215) or even later. Extensive use of a yellowish tint in imitation of gold (chlamys, wings,



Fig. 10. Representations of the archangel Michael from the west wall of the staircase of the Cathedral at Faras: top, earlier image from the 8th century (National Museum in Warsaw, 234043 MN); bottom, later image from the 10th century (National Museum in Warsaw, 234042 MN) (Courtesy National Museum in Warsaw | top, photo P. Ligier; bottom, after Michałowski 1974: Pl. 32).

11 In the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw (see Michałowski 1974: 168, No. 32, Pl. 32), now on temporary loan in the Louvre.

halo, *maniakion*) recalls the Comnenian style in Byzantium. The attributes and the use of a yellowish-golden tint identify this image as an archangel instead of an ordinary angel. This archangel was identified as Michael, although Stefan Jakobielski pointed out that the "absence of characteristic attributes indicates that it could just as easily be a representation of any of the archangels" (Jakobielski et



Fig. 11. Archangel Michael from the narthex of the Cathedral at Faras, first layer of plaster (National Museum in Warsaw, 234062 MN) (Courtesy National Museum in Warsaw | photo P. Ligier)

al. 2017: 215). Nevertheless, the fact that it covered an earlier painting of the Archangel Michael suggests that it represented the same archangel.

Another two images of archangels were painted on the south wall of the staircase, again in the same superimposition as described above, that is, the same theme repeated on a new coat of plaster (Godlewski 2006: Fig. 58). The earlier one is on display at the National Museum in Warsaw (Michałowski 1974: 122–125, Cat. No. 17, Pl. 17) [see Fig. 12]. This painting, dated to the mid-9th century (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 173, Cat. No. 36) or later¹² is luckily better preserved than the previously described ones. The archangel stands frontally, his feet apart. He holds a scepter in his right hand and an orb in his left one. The acclamation on the orb reads: IC XC NIKA ("Jesus Christ conquers"). His attire consists of a long-sleeved white tunic with embroidered *orbiculi*, and *epimanikia* and a purple *loros*, crossed on the chest, with the edge dropping vertically decorated with a fringe (Łaptaś 2016: 473). His hair, trimmed below the ears, is elegantly curled. The head of the archangel is topped with a *stemma*, studded with precious stones. The wings of the archangel are lowered. They are adorned with peacock's feathers. The *titulus* written vertically by the right arm of the archangel is partly destroyed, leaving only the three last letters of his name: AEA. This is the end of a theophoric name, appropriate to Michael, Raphael, as well as Iael. Some scholars have identi-

¹² The *loros* worn by the archangel is of a kind similar to the one worn by the emperor Alexander (912–913) on a mosaic in the Hagia Sophia, indicating a later dating for the mural from Faras. Bożena Mierzejewska (2014: 85) noted this element and dated the painting to the second half of the 9th–first quarter of the 10th century.

fied this figure as Michael (Kubińska 1974: 172), but others as Raphael (Mierzejewska 2014: 84), arguing in the latter case by reference to the later mural covering this one, which was identified by an accompanying inscription dedicated to the archangel Raphael.

This painting was so severely destroyed at the time of discovery that it was not even taken down from the wall (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 217, Cat. No. 56). The lower part of the figure and the wings could still be seen. The archangel was rendered frontally with lowered wings. The *loros* draped over the tunic identified it as an archangel rather than an ordinary angel. The painting was recently dated to the 10th century (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 217), but it seems to have been created later.¹³ The Greek inscription, painted next to the figure contains a request for protection for “Petros priest of ... (in) Pachoras”.¹⁴ According to Adam Łajtar (2009: 91), the Archangel Raphael is named in this inscription a “guide of the Lost Sheep”, which alludes to the mission of Jesus (Matt. 18:12–14; Luke 15:3–7). The names Sara and Asmodeus, mentioned in this inscription, recall the Book of Tobit (7:10–8:3), and the role of the Archangel as a demon tamer. Raphael was highly venerated in Nubia as a healer, demon tamer, commander-in-chief etc. (Łaptaś 2016: 460), so this inscription confirms his multiple functions.

Placing four images of the archangels on the walls of a staircase leading up to the *empora* is understandable.

Jean Vallery-Radot demonstrated in his research that the upper spaces in churches, such as *emporas* or towers, were dedicated specifically to Archangel Michael. For the sake of argument, let us imagine that the *empora* of the Cathedral at Faras was dedicated to Archangel Michael. It would have fulfilled the three aspects of the cult of the archangel: first, his eternal nature, second, his role as protector of the entrance to the building, and third, his role as *psychopompos*. As commander-in-chief of the celestial hosts, the one who conquered the fallen angel, the archangel was often depicted by the entrances to buildings, even by city gates, the goal being to protect cities and buildings against evil. Resurrection symbolism is introduced by the image of the archangel holding a trumpet (see above), which together with the depiction in the narthex forms part of the program connected with the Last Judgement. The staircase leading to the *empora* was a passage to the afterlife in a metaphorical way.

However, since Raphael and Gabriel also acted as *psychopompoi*, carrying the souls of the deceased to God, it is likely that the *empora* would have been dedicated to more than one archangel.

With the eternal nature of the archangels in mind, let us pass to their images painted on pillars and columns. At least two images of the archangels were painted on the third northern pillar of the Cathedral at Faras. The first, very

13 The elongated figure resembles that of St Epiphanius (dated between the 12th and the mid 13th century, Jakobielski et al. 2017: 417, Cat. No. 137).

14 The Greek translation by Stefan Jakobielski in Jakobielski et al. 2017: 217.

poorly preserved at the time of discovery, was not taken off the wall. It was painted on the eastern face of the pillar. The middle part of the figure was preserved with a fragment of the wings (Łaptaś 2019a: 163, Fig. 1). The archangel was rendered frontally, holding a scepter upright in front of him. The wings visible on both sides were adorned with peacock feathers. Dating in this case depends on the stratigraphy of plaster coats; assuming after Jakobielski that it was painted on the third layer of plaster, the painting could be dated to the 10th–11th centuries (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 228, Cat. No. 62).



Fig. 12. Archangel Raphael(?) from the Cathedral at Faras (National Museum in Warsaw, 234044 MN | after Michałowski 1974: Pl. 17)

The second image of the archangel, depicted on the northern face of the same pillar, was also poorly preserved. However, the surviving lower part of the figure was taken off the wall and is currently in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 228, Cat. No. 63). The rendering of the archangel is similar to the previous one, standing, feet apart, holding a scepter in front of him [Fig. 13]. He is dressed in elegant court attire: a long tunic and a ceremonial *loros* with *thorakion*.¹⁵ This ceremonial part of the dress is decorated with golden medallions studded with green and red precious stones. Also the *tsangia* are adorned with rosettes. The inscription written inside the frame, by the foot of the figure reads: "Lord Jesus Christ (and) Michael, guard, bless, protect, strengthen, (and) help Thy servant." Thus, the figure can be identified as Michael.

The next image is that of an angel (not an archangel this time) painted on the third northern pilaster on the north wall of the northern aisle. It is interesting not for its sophisticated composition, which is rather standard, but because of its association with an inscription containing the name of an angel, Litarkuel (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 271, Cat. No. 78) [Fig. 14]. The mural was painted apparently on the first plaster coat in this part of the church and was transferred to the National Museum in Warsaw despite its poor state of preservation. The surviving part shows a standing figure, feet apart. One can see the bottom parts of a long tunic adorned with vertical stripes, the hem trimmed with a horizontal band

15 More about a *loros* with *thorakion* in Nubian painting, see Łaptaś forthcoming.

decorated with a lattice pattern filled with dots. The mantle visible on either side of the figure falls in vertical folds. The cross, painted below and between the figure's feet, is accompanied by a Greek inscription reading: "Jesus Christ, Cross".

A Greek invocation to the angel Litarkuel is preserved by the right side of the figure. It reads:

"Lord Jesus Christ (and) Litarquel, guard, bless, protect, strengthen (and) help Thy servant Martere, daughter of Isusinta. So be it. Amen".



Fig. 13. The Archangel Michael painted on a pillar in the nave of the Cathedral at Faras (National Museum in Warsaw, 234006 MN) (Courtesy National Museum in Warsaw | photo P. Ligier)

This painting, dated to the early 11th century (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 270–271, Cat. No. 78), is the only known image of this angel in Nubian painting. The name Litharkouël is known from an apocryphal text, *The Investiture of Archangel Gabriel*, where it is listed with four other angels: Ouriël, Sourathiël, Daveithaël and Yeremiël. The function of each of the angels is different: Ouriël holds “all the powers of God in his hands”, Sourathiël is a “messenger to the prophets”, Daveithaël “dwells in the church of the firstborn children”, Yeremiël cares for all “who struggle in this world”, and Litharkouël “who holds the unguent box filled with the medicine of life” and he heals every soul (Jenott 2020: 572). Lance Jenott noted a resemblance between this angel and the “mysterious figure” of the angel Lithargoel from the apocryphal *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* (NHC VI,1). There, Lithargoel, clad as a physician, also carries an unguent box, and ultimately turns out to be Jesus in disguise, a healer of bodies and souls



Fig. 14. The angel Litarkuel on a pillar in the nave of the Cathedral at Faras (National Museum in Warsaw, 234019 MN) (Courtesy National Museum in Warsaw | after Michałowski 1974: Pl. 55)



Fig. 15. Archangel Raphael on a three-quarter column by the apse of Church SWN.B.V in Old Dongola (Courtesy PCMA UW QSAP Dongola Project | photo W. Godlewski)

(Jenott 2020: 562–563). A broader approach to the issue of the Christ Angel in Nubian painting, demanding a more profound study, is beyond the scope of this paper (for a brief discussion, see Łaptaś 2019b: 103–105).

The last image to be discussed here is one of a number of representations of archangels painted on the supporting elements of Church SWN.B.V in Old Dongola (Zielińska 2015: 108). The murals from this church will be published once the conservation treatment is completed. The image of the archangel Raphael, dated by the excavator to the 8th–9th century (Godlewski 2018b: 166), was painted on a three-quarter column attached to the east wall of the nave by the church apse (Godlewski 2018a: Fig. 10.1)



Fig. 16. The interior of Church SWN.B.V in Old Dongola (arrow indicates location of the three-quarter column with the image of Archangel Raphael shown in Fig. 15) (Courtesy PCMA UW QSAP Dongola Project | photo W. Godlewski)

[Fig. 15].¹⁶ The archangel is rendered frontally, holding a cross-scepter in his right hand and a disk in the left one. His head is topped by a golden crown, studded with precious stones and surrounded by a halo, while his spectacular wings are adorned with peacock feathers and eyes. The archangel is dressed in a long-sleeved tunic and a goldish chlamys on top of this, fastened with a fibula on his right shoulder. The *titulus* "Archangel Raphael" is written by the right side of the figure, above the head. This image shows clearly that Michael was not the only archangel in Nubian art to be depicted with peacock feathers (Martens-Czarnecka 2020: 79).

The location of this painting is also interesting [Fig. 16]. The image of Michael appears on a three-quarter column by the southern side of the apse, while Raphael was painted on the northern side of the apse. The painting in the apse was poorly preserved, but there was clear evidence of figures of the apostles surrounding the central figure of the composition in the apse. The identification of this figure will be clearer after restoration. A scene of the *Maiestas Domini* most probably filled the conch above the apse. The faithful entering the church would have seen Raphael on the left and Michael on the right side of the apse. However, viewed from the perspective of the Lord, whose place was in the conch of the apse, Raphael stood by his right

hand and Michael by his left. The four archangels surrounding the throne of God are described in some texts, e.g., in the *Ethiopic Book of Henoch*.

"I looked, and on the four sides of the Lord of Spirits, I saw four figures ..." (1 En. 40:2)

"This first one, is the Holy Michael, the merciful and long-suffering. And the second, who is in charge of all the diseases, and in charge of all the wounds of the sons of men, is Raphael. And the third, who is in charge of all the powers, is the Holy Gabriel. And the fourth, who is in charge of repentance and hope of those who will inherit eternal life, is Phanuel" (1 En. 40:9).

This symbolism was known also in Dongola. In the *Oratio Mariae ad Bartos* prayer written on the walls of a crypt under the Northwestern Annex of the Monastery on Kom H, the Virgin says: "Let Michael be on my right, let Gabriel be on my left" (Lajtar and van der Vliet 2017: 104).

Why was Raphael represented by the right hand of God and Michael by His left in the SWN.B.V Church? In Byzantine hierarchy the right side of God (and of the emperor) was considered the more privileged one. As the patron of the church Raphael could have been the more privileged archangel here.

16 I am using the terminology from the multilingual dictionary of the architecture by René Ginouvès et al. (1992: 66).

CONCLUSION

A study of this selected group of images shows that Nubia continued a tradition developed in Early Christian and Byzantine art. This tradition, grew out of pre-Christian models and was strong enough to have an impact on later art, independently of the Biblical descriptions (in which wings, for example, were not mentioned). The ancient models spread to the East and West, hence the parallelism between Nubian and western images and their contexts (analogous to western examples appearing also in Nubian art).

Images painted on the walls of the Cathedral staircase at Faras may be proof that the gallery over the entrance was dedicated to the archangel Michael, if not to other archangels as well. The attributes and the inscriptions accompanying the paintings

confirm that this part of the Cathedral was symbolically linked with the idea of Salvation, whereas peregrination to the upper space symbolized the path to Resurrection and to Paradise. This "higher space" was the preferred surroundings of the archangels who hovered above the ground.

In turn, images of the archangels on architectural supporting elements—pillars, columns, etc.—go back to the idea of celestial beings, connected with the forces of nature and the astronomical world order. Nubian paintings are two-dimensional, which makes them different from images of antique caryatids, but the idea is nonetheless the same. They are celestial spirits supporting the heavenly vault and the throne of God.

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